


Finding ways to create positive change to benefit communities

Hamzat Lawal (right) co-founded the grass-roots group Follow The Money. (Photo )
Credit: Refined Creative).

[Hamzat Lawal](#) knew that he had to do something about what he saw in Zamfara state, Nigeria.

In 2012, news reports of more than 1,500 children poisoned and over 400 children dead prompted him to act. Where were the promised funds that were supposed to clean up the lead contamination?

That year he co-founded Follow The Money, a grass-roots organization of citizens, journalists, data wranglers, information analysts, lawyers and others who advocate for, track and visualize data on aid and government spending to ensure that promised funds end up where they're supposed to go. Now, Follow The Money is an initiative of Connected Development (CODE), a nongovernmental organization whose mission is to shine a light on government spending, improve access to information and empower Africans.

Lawal believes that individuals who want to create a successful campaign or movement must understand at the outset that they are working to change a mindset. Before starting to organize people around a grass-roots campaign, Hamzat says, organizers should consider how and where they get information. How do the people they're hoping to organize get information? And how would organizers reach an audience that does not have access to mass media?

Most importantly, Lawal challenges organizers to engage stakeholders face to face: "Leave your comfort zone so that you go and become one of them. Go to the community and do outreach — document the voices of the people and how a problem has affected them and their community. People will join your campaign because of the information you have to share and their agreement with your ideology."

Once they've met their stakeholders, organizers should analyze the data collected — clearly identifying the issue or problem, setting priorities, identifying possible solutions and enlisting friends as potential volunteers and workers. Lawal encourages them to identify the necessary skills and start to define roles and responsibilities among the team, agree on messaging and begin to fundraise using various platforms (online/offline).

According to Lawal, "If you run a successful campaign, you will get noticed, you will mobilize people, and you will get funding."

(Photo Credit: Refined Creative)



Hamzat "Hamzy" Lawal is an activist who has successfully supported grass-roots campaigns in over 40 African countries with over seven years' experience in the nonprofit sector. He specializes in practical issues associated with climate change, open data and development policies as they affect rural communities. He is the co-founder and chief executive of [Connected Development \(CODE\)](#), leading the development and implementation of the overall organization's strategy with

responsibilities of creating, communicating and implementing the organization's vision, mission and overall direction.

Hamzy is also the co-founder of [Follow The Money](#), a grass-roots, data-driven movement, and leads a team of technology and innovation-driven campaigners to amplify voices of marginalized communities while promoting accountability and good governance as it affects utilization of public funds focusing on specific communities in Nigeria.

He sits on the executive board of the largest youth movement in Africa, the African Youth Initiative on Climate Change (AYICC), advising on communications with over 40,000 young people to share best practices and leading campaigns using technology tools in shaping the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Joining the Campaign for the Candidate You Believe In



names on voter registration lists outside a polling station in Porto Novo, Benin, during the 2011 election. (© AP Images)

Last year, Vital Sounouvou was working in Dubai, keeping an eye on the run-up to the 2016 elections back home in Benin. At 25, Sounouvou is founder of [Exportunity.com](#), a company working to

promote global trade in Africa, to make it cheaper and easier for countries to do business with Benin and other developing African economies.

Some of what he saw was too familiar: candidates with a lot of money to spend who Sounouvou didn't think were motivated by what was best for Benin. It is common in Benin for candidates to give out [cash to voters](#), even though studies have shown this tactic has little effect on how a voter behaves at the polls.

Where Sounouvou sees the greatest damage and potential for [corruption](#) is when candidates pay community leaders to publicly support them. "When local influencers are paid to speak about someone they don't believe in, they end up convincing those who [don't have] access to the real information. People will vote for the person who has been spoken about the most."



urtesy photo)

But when Sounouvou found out a man he admired was planning on running for president, he decided that giving his vote was not enough. He offered his services and returned to Benin to help plan the campaign. "It's the first campaign I've worked on," said Sounouvou. "It's not something I'd do as a career. I'm just doing this because I believe in [the candidate]."

He wasn't alone. Sounouvou's experience with Exportunity.com earned him the position of communications team head for the campaign, and he's been directing a team of 40 young volunteers since January. "Our job is to transmit our candidate's vision to the population and broadcast it in all possible ways."

Sounouvou also coordinates regional communications teams throughout Benin. He and his team meet daily at the campaign office to strategize and to work to counteract falsehoods he says are being spread by the wealthier campaigns.

It's the first campaign in Benin to fully take advantage of social media, using WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. "The best way to combat money is with conviction and truth," Sounouvou said.

"On the average day, I come to the office, where there's a room with computers and a big screen. I share an office with two other volunteers. Everything is run from that room."

The biggest challenge his team faces is that their candidate doesn't have nearly as much money as his opponents. But Sounouvou thinks the candidate's vision and the enthusiasm of his young supporters in getting the word out can make up for what they don't have in cash.

He credits his candidate's ability to both talk to and listen to young people for the volunteers' willingness to give a month of their time to help him get elected. In the lead-up to the official campaign launch, the candidate would often ask for his young supporters' input. "Three days ago he called asking if I'd seen his speech," said Sounouvou. The candidate asked Sounouvou what he thought and how he could improve his message. "A lot of young people are discovering him right now," Sounouvou said. "A lot of young people are getting involved because the guy knows how to talk to young people."

In the days leading up to the election, Sounouvou feels optimistic about what he and the other volunteers have done to support their candidate. "I can't say if it will be effective, because we haven't voted yet," said Sounouvou. "What I can say is that at the end I'll feel good because I feel that I'm in the right fight."

Take the YALI Network Online Course "[Understanding Elections and Civic Responsibility](#)" to learn, among other things, how to lead and enable citizens to create change in their communities.

Ghanaian youth will reject election violence with peace walk

(© AP Images)



Elections should be celebrated as a peaceful and democratic way to change governments, but too often they are flashpoints for violence that actively recruit young people.

But in Ghana, Comfort Glikpo is enlisting young people to make a strong, unifying statement for peace ahead of her country's November 7 general elections. Her organization, [Dels Foundation](#), organized a Youth for Peace walk to be held this September, where 5,000 people will walk through Accra and call on others to reject involvement in electoral violence.

"We intend to use the occasion to create awareness that Ghanaians are one people with a common destiny, to let the youth know that regardless of political differences or ethnic extraction, tribal or

religious attributions, we are still one people,” Glikpo said.

In addition to the peace walk, she said, volunteers from her foundation will be working with youth in communities, homes and schools around the country to spread the message of shunning violence and instead using their influence to promote good governance and build better societies.

“This project is committed to redirecting the youth potential to productive ventures to empower them with knowledge and skills in peacebuilding leadership development, as they are made Ambassadors of Peace,” she said.


Youth violence during elections is caused by several factors, including ethnic and religious differences, extreme poverty, unemployment and incentives such as offers of money, alcohol or drugs, she said. Young people can be redirected through education that creates awareness and empathy for other groups and instills in them the values of good leadership and nonviolence.

To attract participants, Dels Foundation created a registration portal and advertised it across social media sites like [Facebook](#), Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp. The organization is also directly in contact with schools, places of worship and other institutions to spread the word.

Interested in organizing your own election-related event? Glikpo advises YALI Network members to “get the message where it matters” and try to overcome funding challenges by using social media and other technology to target the grass roots. Know what kind of event you are organizing and who will be participating, and have a plan for finding volunteers and sponsorship.

Because of funding, “it hasn’t been easy putting things together,” she said. But “we won’t give up. We believe it is a worthy cause and we will do our best to ensure that Ghana is peaceful, before, during and after the 2016 elections.”

[You too, one day, can be president](#)

Catherine Samba-Panza was interim President of the Central African Republic from 2014 to  2016 (AP Images)

Women are quite capable of going into politics.

Does that seem obvious to you? It is not for everyone. In many countries, female candidates must scramble to convince voters and even their own party that they are qualified to assume an elected position.

“No one ever asks if men are capable,” notes Caroline Hubbard, senior adviser on gender, women and democracy at the National Democratic Institute (NDI), who answered questions from Chadian leaders during an online chat in late March. Statistics speak for themselves: “When women

participate, countries do better, she says. Research shows that the more women hold elected positions, the greater the standards of living in the country.”

The [list of contributions of elected women is long](#). Yet less than a quarter of the world’s parliamentarians are women. “We must change attitudes,” recommends Caroline Hubbard. How?

For example, she suggests that a civil society organization can build a campaign to change the image of women in politics. “It can put forward leaders and successful women and, using existing statistics, give examples of how women contribute” once elected. It is also important to adapt to the local culture and to “develop arguments to convince your neighbors, your family and your political party.”

At the level of political parties, indeed, changes are needed. Of course, thanks to the quota system, parties have selected more women to represent them in elections. Unfortunately, they let them too rarely appear at the top of the electoral list.

“Men should be the allies of women in politics”

According to Hubbard, it is also crucial to look for respected men, such as religious leaders, and convince them to spread the message. “We need to make allies among those who have power. These are often men,” she says.

Another great barrier against women happens at the individual level. “Often they do not understand how politics can improve their lives,” laments Hubbard, who encourages political parties to make themselves more accessible to women.

“Even at home, I teach my girls that women also are leaders”

Leadership training should begin at 10-12 years, says Hubbard. “You have to explain to them what politics is, and show them examples of women leaders, she advocates. And it is important to start early in order to avoid having girls ‘digest’ this idea that women are not capable.”

Many U.S. organizations are trying to develop girls’ leadership. The State Department partners with some of them [to encourage girls and women to play sports, for example](#). For it is a fact that girls’ participation in sports helps them to excel not only as athletes, but in life as well.

You want to run for office? Hubbard offers the following strategy:

- 1 - First, talk to your family and explain the benefits of your candidacy for you, for democracy and for the country;
- 2 - Try to convince the party leaders first, and then the citizens;
- 3 - Learn how to find money to fund your campaign;
- 4 - Learn how to use non-monetary resources (volunteers, etc.);
- 5 - Learn how to develop a targeted message to communicate to the public and the media (traditional and social media)
- 6 - Learn how to manage a team.

You can meet like minded people who want to make a difference in their community in the [YALI Network](#). And take a look at their [#YALIVotes](#) campaign!

Women candidates: what strategy should you use to win?

(AP Images)



"Your campaign must be scientific, and come from the heart at the same time. "

That's what Caroline Hubbard, senior advisor on Gender, Women and Democracy at the National Democratic Institute (NDI), recommends to women candidates in elections. Hubbard answered questions from Chadian leaders during a webchat late March.

Compared to their male opponents, female candidates are left with many disadvantages, she said, especially when it comes to finances. So being well organized is crucial. She suggests the following plan made of four phases:

- Research: your precinct, your opponents, the local actors;
- Identification: identify the voters, the issues, the campaign message, your resources, and the campaign team;
- Communication: develop a strategy to talk to the public and to the media;
- Campaign: know your message, target voters to spread your message, use all available means of communication.

How to stand out without a big budget

"You have to, and you can ask for money to fund your campaign," Hubbard says. She encourages candidates to solicit only people who are excited by the elections and your campaign. "Be specific: tell them exactly how much you need and what the money will be used for."

What can female candidates do when their own party do not support them financially? Hubbard gave the example of Mexico, where "women have advocated to change campaign finance laws and forced the parties to allocate to female candidates 2 percent of the funds the government give them for campaign expenses."

Running as an independent is another possibility, but the risk is to remain completely unknown to the public. Hence it's import "to identify allies who have power," says Hubbard. "They may be religious leaders or community leaders, that is to say people who will be able to convince others to vote for you and help you find resources."

Independent candidates can also gain visibility by forming coalitions or run on a ticket (or slate) with other female candidates.

Volunteers are essential



When you have a small budget, you need volunteers. “To help you with your campaign, look for students or young members of your political party who want to gain experience in politics,” suggests Hubbard. “You can also convince women to work for you by explaining how they will benefit from having more women in power.”

What role can civil society play?

Civil society can:

- Create campaigns and show that women can be good leaders;
- Educate women on the importance of voting – which can lead to the election of more women;
- Introduce women’s issues at the heart of the election debates, forcing candidates to take a stand.

Avoid empty promises and have a positive message

Be honest about your campaign promises, recommends Hubbard. You will have more chances to be reelected.

Avoid negative language. “Instead of pointing your opponent’s weaknesses, highlight the strengths of your candidacy. ”

Stay calm and avoid stereotypes: “Women do not have the same freedom to fight. They are often seen as shouting too much, complaining too much, “says Hubbard. If your opponent attacks you, bring back the debate on your message because in the end, “people want to know what you will do to improve their lives, not to whom you are married.”

You can meet like minded people who want to make a difference in their community in the [YALI Network](#). And take a look at their [#YALIVotes](#) campaign!

Don’t write off your local elections

(© AP Images)



Parliamentary and presidential elections seem to get all of the attention, while local and municipal government contests are notorious for their low voter turnout. Yet it’s the local authorities who play a much greater role in your day-to-day life and around your neighborhood.

According to the [National Democratic Institute](#), Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mali, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be having local and municipal elections later in 2016. Will voters stay away? Here are some things they might want to consider:

- Are you satisfied with the quality and reliability of public utilities like water, sewage, electricity and gas?
- How are the schools where you live? Are there enough teachers and resources? Are they provided with enough funding?
- How are the local roads and traffic? Are unrepaired potholes damaging cars? Is it easy to get to work on time?
- With cities experiencing rapid growth, are good decisions being made about new housing and commercial developments?
- Are buses or other forms of public transportation reliable and affordable?
- Does your community have adequate libraries or public meeting spaces?

Local officials, including mayors, village councils and ward chiefs, are seeking your vote, and elections are the time to hold them accountable by rewarding them for positive impacts they have made on daily life, or else replacing them with candidates who could do a better job. They make the decisions and often hold the purse strings. A good local official is one who knows that, with the limited resources under their control, the community will prosper more from a large development project that could bring jobs, or if there is a more urgent need to address failing public services.

The #YALIVotes campaign isn't just to bring attention to what is happening on the national scene. If citizens are going to use their vote and the democratic process to improve where they live, their best near-term prospects are through their local government. Learn more by following the lesson on [engaging with candidates and elected officials](#) that's part of the YALI Network Online Course on Understanding Elections and Civic Responsibility.

[Got something to say? Take it to the airwaves.](#)

A man listens to a radio in rural Kenya. (© AP Images)



What kind of communication is readily available, cheap and reliable even when there is no electricity? Answer: radio! The medium [maintains its dominance](#) in areas that do not have good Internet connectivity. For some YALI Networkers, getting on the air may be the most effective way to tell a wide audience about the projects you are doing and attract new supporters.

Many living in sub-Saharan African countries are taking advantage of community radio networks, which have been funded primarily by external donor countries, church organizations and international development agencies, and through advertising.

Network member Michael Kganyago has founded two youth community radio stations in South Africa: Tshwane Youth Street Radio and Polokwane Youth Street FM. While he acquires the

equipment to get his stations on the air, he has been visiting neighboring radio outlets to conduct interviews and call-in programs about the [YALI Network online courses](#).

Jarius Andrew Greaves wrote from Liberia that he has live programs on local FM stations and pre-records another that is distributed on United Nations Mission in Liberia Radio. Ephrem Bekele said he has used his appearances on Ethiopian radio to play all of the YALI Network online civic leadership courses on the air.

If you have an interview coming up, here are some helpful tips [from the web](#) and other Network members to help get you prepared:


- Have a brief bio ready that the host can use to introduce you.
- Know what you want to say in advance. Have three main points you want your listeners to come away with. Additional material is fine, but don't overload your audience!
- Radio is show business, so try to entertain while educating. Think of interesting stories to share.
- Keep it short. You can say a lot in 10-20 seconds, and that makes an easy sound bite for the program host to use for continued promotion.
- Listen to the show in advance to get familiar with the host's style and the structure of the program.

Network member Ako Essan Emile from Côte d'Ivoire works in a radio station and advises that you know your target audience when you are reaching out to a station. For example, if you want to reach teenage listeners, you will have better luck on a station that plays contemporary pop rather than jazz or classical music.

Through friends, Senegal's Oumar Ba was able to get on a radio show to discuss his involvement in the #YALIGoesGreen campaign for a special Earth Day broadcast. He shared this advice:

"Don't be afraid of being turned down. Just go to a local radio station you know, explain to them clearly who you are, the courses you have done with the online YALI program, show them the certificate you have got, [and] if possible write a résumé," he said.

[YALI Goes Green and Accepts the Earth Day Call to Action](#)

(A YALI Network member participates in a #YALIGoesGreen event. Photo courtesy of  Abdinasir Gaylab, YALI Network face2face)

Jeffrey Richardson is an AmeriCorps alumnus and advocate for service and volunteerism. As executive director of the Commission for National and Community Service in Washington, Jeffrey led national, state and local community engagement initiatives promoting service and volunteerism as a sustainable solution for meeting unmet community needs. Jeffrey is a writer, executive coach and

management consultant advising senior executives in nonprofit groups, higher education, and state and local government.

In honor of Earth Day, the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) has gone green from April 22 through May 15 to promote climate-change awareness. As a growing network of more than 220,000 young African leaders, the YALI Network is well positioned to help lead on climate-change awareness and Network leaders across the continent are accepting the call to action. In April I had the honor of facilitating a YALI Network “Organizing for Action” course in preparation for Earth Day 2016 and discussed climate-change awareness and environmental education with YALI Network participants in Maputo, Mozambique.

With growing concerns over the impact of drought on agriculture and overall health, YALI Network members in Mozambique wanted to know what they could do to educate and inspire more people to take action on climate change. Joining the growing number of the world’s population who accept climate change’s impact, the recurring question was how and where to begin. As an individual, the complexity and broad impact of climate change can be seen as too complicated and too intimidating to take on. And that is precisely why YALI has “gone green.” As a network of young leaders, you have the collective knowledge, experience, tools and reach to increase awareness of climate change not only in Africa, but around the world.

(Courtesy of Jeffrey Richardson)




YALI has compiled a catalog of resources and tools that you can use to educate yourself and others about climate change and its impact across the globe and specifically in Africa. Take the first step by visiting yali.state.gov/climate/ and completing one of the listed actions to earn your #YALIGoesGreen badge. If you haven’t already, I strongly encourage you to take the YALI Network “Understanding Climate Change” online course to increase your awareness and understanding.

Earning your #YALIGoesGreen badge is just the first step. Once you have accepted the call to action, your job is to educate and inspire others to join the movement. To get you going, here are four tips for framing your own call to action.

- Begin with your personal story. You do not have to be a climate-change expert in order to educate and inspire others. Sharing your personal story of why climate change is important to you, and how it is affecting your family and community, can be just as strong as any scientific data — and for many people even more compelling.
- Make the issue relatable. Connect the impact of climate change to your audience’s daily life. People are more likely to listen and follow up when they can understand a direct connection to their life, health and ability to provide for themselves and their loved ones.
- Make an ask. Each and every time you have the opportunity to speak about the impact of climate change, ask people to take some level of action. It can be as simple as sharing information with family, friends and colleagues, or more involved such as organizing a community event.
- Invite others to join the YALI Network. As network members you are positioned to expand the voices of young leaders fostering change in their communities and their countries. Share YALI’s virtual resources and connect other young African leaders with the tools and technology to promote leadership and manifest change.

The Young African Leaders Initiative has opened access to the tools, information and technology needed to educate, empower and inspire innovation, but this alone will not manifest change. It is your ideas, passion and vision that are the catalysts for action. Our future is up to us and you are a required piece of the puzzle. Go Forth, Go Green and Go Lead!

Election Time: Activism, Dedication and Ingenuity Can Empower the Young

Student artists perform at Sciences Po's "Beats Across Borders" fundraiser to help  refugees. (Courtesy of Sciences Po)

This is the fourth article in a series titled "Election Time: Lessons from Young Leaders."

Vittoria Moretti is an Italian student in the Master of Human Rights and Humanitarian Action Program at the Paris Institute of International Affairs. Throughout her life, she has been actively engaged in tackling human rights issues, with particular regard to refugees and migrants' rights and natural resource governance. After having lived in different countries across Europe, she will move to Africa in June to complete her next semester abroad.

The views and opinions expressed here belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the YALI Network or the U.S. government.

How many times have we been told, as "inexperienced" or "naïve" young people eager to change the world, to face reality and stop believing we can change the system?

Listen to our story and you won't believe that anymore. You will learn that, as the Swahili proverb says, "Where there is a will, there is a way," and that everyone has the power to make a small but significant difference.

Take a half-dozen motivated students from different countries and cultures and put them together in a demanding university environment. Imagine them meeting during a protest in the center of Paris, calling for a more humane Europe that doesn't close its borders to the thousands of people fleeing conflict, and welcoming migrants no matter what restrictions their governments impose.

These six students have a common fight, shared values of solidarity, and the desire to do something concrete to help — but how? A few days later, they meet again with the flame of hope still motivating them and decide to launch an association to raise awareness about the plight of refugees who arrive in France after perilous journeys and to support them with material, legal and social assistance.

The result? Sciences Po Refugee Help came into existence not by big budgets but through the principles of self-organization, personal commitment, and a bit of confidence with social media

platforms — not a rare quality in our generation.

Since October 2015, when Sciences Po Refugee Help was officially recognized by our university, almost 2,000 people have followed our Facebook page, including 230 active volunteers. Other Sciences Po campuses around France have joined our efforts and set up their own branches. We have launched initiatives to finance our activities and provide migrants with some of the essential goods and services they need.

In February, for example, we organized a concert, Beats Across Borders, with local artists and featuring testimonies by refugees, which allowed us to raise €4,000, a small but significant amount of money to buy sleeping bags, shoes, dictionaries and SIM cards that allow refugees to speak with family and friends back home. We convinced hotels to donate hygiene products to help migrants avoid contracting diseases from poor sanitation. We also initiated a partnership with schools to collect old stationery that, otherwise, would have been thrown away.

One of our most important lessons was how to make use of used goods. For example, recycled and second-hand materials are a cost-effective solution to save money and reduce waste. We cannot directly help Afghans, Sudanese or Syrians to obtain a visa, nor can we, by ourselves, provide the social assistance they need to live decently in our community. Nevertheless, we can make their lives easier by providing them with a blanket, a free meal, a French class or, sometimes, just a warm word of support. Although it might seem a small step for mankind in this dark time of widespread suffering, it is a giant leap for our local community — and it is often at the local level where we can most improve the lives of those around us.

With such high percentages of young people in many African countries, the experience of Sciences Po Refugee Help might be a useful reference for young activists on how to increase resources and support in their campaigns. Setting up concerts and art events is an enjoyable and effective way to raise money to support our cause, which can be easily implemented by small groups without significant logistic or material resources. At the same time, organizing debates with local activists and young leaders is another powerful means to raise awareness over sensitive issues, building networks of followers and sowing the seeds for innovative and fresh ideas to circulate and take root.

We do not mean to feed simplistic hopes that it is easy to solve today's challenges, nor provide a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, we want to share a story that we hope can inspire, motivate and encourage other young people worldwide to take action through small and easy steps to address the injustice and indifference of the system. When doubters say that our gestures are only drops in the ocean, we say yes. And drops are exactly what the ocean is made of.

Want to read more articles from the "Election Time: Lessons from Young Leaders" series? Please find them here:

[Election Time: Want More Young People to Vote? Go Online](#)

[When Enough Is Enough: Urban Guerilla Poetry](#)

[Election Time: Lessons from Young Leaders](#)

Is Urban Farming the Green Answer to Rapid City Growth?

A South African woman waters vegetables in a Johannesburg garden. (© AP Images)



According to the United Nations, the annual urban growth rate in sub-Saharan Africa is 3.6 percent, which is nearly double the global average. The rapid rise in population is causing city dwellers to look into urban farming as a way of reducing food costs and rainfall runoff and providing some temperature relief in the expanding “concrete jungle.”

Growing popular but short-lived foods like amaranth, sorrel, lettuce and tomato near where you live will provide you with the freshest quality product while also helping the environment by decreasing the distance these types of items would otherwise have to travel to a city market from rural farms.

The type of urban farm or garden you grow depends on the location you have to work with — for example, a rooftop, yard or area of vacant land — and a water source adequate to the area and types of plants being grown.

Before starting, it is always important to remember that a) if you do not own the land, you cannot guarantee how long your project will last, and b) if you are growing plants for food, the soil may need to first be cleaned of harmful chemicals.

Some people have the goal of combating climate change by not only creating a pocket of green space that can absorb greenhouse gas emissions, but also providing an area to convert urban organic waste into fertilizer and capturing rainfall that would otherwise cause erosion from street runoff and eventually need to be treated in city utility plants.

Also consider approaching the municipality, a local school or a place of worship. If you have a viable plan for their vacant land area, they may be very open to the idea that it is an area they would not need to be responsible for in terms of upkeep or beautification, which could be costing them money and labor. Schools may also welcome the educational opportunity for students of a “hands-on” classroom to learn about agriculture.

If you have a large space to work with and plenty of help, you could also consider urban farming as a way to make money. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), some large African cities have also proven to be highly productive farms. For example, in a year, one hectare of land in Accra, Ghana, can yield 180 metric tons of lettuce, while 500 hectares of gardens produce 80 percent of the leafy vegetables in Brazzaville, the Republic of the Congo.

For more information, FAO has published a [report](#) discussing the benefits and challenges of urban farming in sub-Saharan Africa, including profiles of specific African countries.
